



ENTER God's presence

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

- Psalm 100:1-3

Heavenly Father, we are your people and we gather together now to hear your word. Renew in us your Holy Spirit and make your Word come alive in us again. Remove from us the distractions and concerns of our day and help us to simply rest in your presence as we gather as your people. Amen.



SHARE life together

1. **How have you seen Jesus at work in your life this week?**
2. **Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
3. **What do the words 'religion' or 'religious' mean to you?**
4. **Instead of highs and lows, see if you can share a positive and/or negative experience of 'religion'.**

"Free Religion Template...download here." Jesus Crown Thorns. Islamic Mosque Sunset. Monk Buddhism Meditation. Take your pick...attractive templates, perfect for every presentation. A template gives you a preset mold, form, document that you can use all over again, to provide design consistency, a set overall look and feel. You just have to choose which template you want to use. So often when it comes to Church and faith, we take a cookie-cutter approach, operate in a pre-determined way to make all people look and feel the same. Just tick the boxes, add some of the components like going to church, saying grace occasionally, putting a couple of dollars on the offering plate and you will have the look, feel and benefit of being a Christian. Perhaps it is this template concept that has led to 68% of Christians here in Australia not seeing faith as important in daily life. Jesus didn't come so we could tick a couple of boxes and feel good about ourselves. Today he throws the template out the window to bring a radical change that gives an eternal relationship and life beyond religion.

Week beginning
Sunday 16th May 2021

Worship series:
Life Pulse



VEDGE for the week

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16



REMEMBER this week

Jesus Christ was lifted up on the cross to bring the change that needs to happen in your life. That's the heart and centre of life now and life forever.



LISTEN attentively

Read John 4:1-26; 39-42

5. **What do you find challenging/confusing/comforting about this text?**
6. **If you had the opportunity to stand before Jesus and ask him to explain something, what would you ask him?**
7. **What is the most difficult faith question you have ever been asked? How did you answer it?**

Living a life of faith is no easy feat these days. With advances in technology and our growing understanding of how the world works there is little room left for the unexplainable. It seems that everything has to be explainable. This can be intimidating when God's Word tells us to live by faith and not by sight (Romans 1:17, 2 Cor 5:7, Gal 3:11-12). It is made even more difficult when our faith is to be in something, or rather someone, not only that we cannot see, but that is also so far beyond our human ability to fully comprehend. When this happens, we automatically default into defining mode. We label things and place limits on them, trying to define their behavior, limit their abilities or properties to something that we can understand and manipulate. The whole realm of human scientific endeavour is bent on this one express purpose. This is where poor old Nicodemus had trouble. He could see that Jesus was someone special, and was prepared to admit Jesus had been sent by God, at the very least as a specially anointed teacher, maybe even a prophet, because this was something familiar; that was something God had done in the past. However, Jesus was so much more than that. Jesus was God doing something he had never done before and Nicodemus simply was not prepared to accept this.

8. **When have you been required to do or investigate something you have never done before? How did it make you feel?**
9. **In what ways do you think you might have tried to put God in a box to make him feel safer or more understandable or approachable?**

Just like science is humanity's endeavour to try to understand and control the world around us, so is theology our attempt to understand who God is and how he interacts with us. At it's best, this is exactly what theology does. However, at times theology – which is a human endeavour – can be used to try to limit and control God. Just go to your local Christian book shop and I'm sure you will find books on how to pray for healing, how to pray for revival, how to pray for wealth and prosperity in your life. All of these are formulas people have contrived to get what they want from God, to make God into someone who gives them what they want, on their terms, when they want it. But God always comes to us on his terms, to bring us exactly what we need (which is not always exactly what we want), exactly when we most need it.

10. **Have you ever had an experience where God has come through for you in a completely unexpected way? Share your experience with the group.**
11. **What do you see as the biggest problem with applying our limited understanding to how God works? What dangers might there be in only expecting God to work in ways we can understand?**



GROW deeper

The realm of theology can sometimes seem so far beyond most of us, but at it's core are simply two observable features. Firstly, the word of God. This is God's self revelation to us, his people. And no where in his Word is he more directly revealed to us than in the Gospels as we encounter his Son Jesus Christ. Except the word alone is not the whole picture. Many literature academics study the Bible but never come to faith in Jesus.

The second part is the work and activity of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God at work in our lives. Jesus talked to Nicodemus about a spiritual rebirth; he talked about baptism. We don't need to enter our mother's womb to be born again, our bodies already have life. What is dead in us is our heart, our spirit. That part of us that was designed to receive its life from a relationship with God, but instead chose to live outside of his

ways. When we have faith in Jesus, when we come to be baptised God pours out on us the Holy Spirit. His Holy Spirit brings God's word alive to us. God's Holy Spirit transforms us and sanctifies us. The Holy Spirit gives us new eyes to see a world full of examples of God at work in unexplainable ways.

- 12. Have you ever attended a church service of a different denomination? What differences or similarities did you observe. Did you still feel like you had encountered God in the worship of his people?**
- 13. Have you, or any one you know, ever experienced an unexplainable or miraculous encounter with God? How have you come to understand what God did in that situation?**



LIVE purposefully

Sometimes we can put our theology, or religion, ahead of God. We might be tempted to say something was not God because it didn't happen in church or because you can't find where it talks about your kind of experience in the Bible. The truth is, we need help to determine what God is up to. We can't pigeon hole him into categories which simply suit our limited understanding because he is so far beyond that. A life of faith is different to a religious life. A life of faith is lived in the love and grace of Jesus, a religious life is lived following the rules and regulations of people and institutions. God's word calls us to live by faith, not by religion.

- 14. How might living in, and living out, the love and grace of Jesus be a more effective witness than 'having all the answers'?**
- 15. How might you approach someone who was exploring Christianity in a way that talks more about Jesus and less about religion?**
- 16. Your story of faith and what God has done in your life is also a story through which the Holy Spirit might work to draw others to Jesus. How would you answer the question, 'Why are you a Christian?'**



PRAY intentionally

- Praise God for his majesty and splendor which are so far beyond our ability to dream or imagine. Thank him for his love and care and for the ways he continues to work for the good of those who love him.
- Ask God to equip and prepare us across all LifeWay sites to step out in faith to whatever he has for us next – even if it is outside our comfort zone or our previous experiences.
- Pray for unity within the Church around the world, that we would continue to find ways to work together for the glory of God despite our theological differences.
- Pray for our LifeWay Pastors, that they may always be guided and led by the wisdom of God and by his Holy Spirit as they endeavour to lead us into new territory and experience as God's people in our various locations.
- Pray for the unrest in the Middle East at this time that peace would be restored.



BLESS one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

[Name], God so loved you that he gave his only Son. Amen.